

## NORTHERN



### Introduction

#### Background and location:

The Northern Region is the largest area of Ghana. As of 2009, it is divided into 20 districts. The region's capital is Tamale.

Climatically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally, the region differs greatly from the politically and economically dominating regions of central and southern Ghana. The Northern Region, which occupies an area of about 70,383 square kilometres, is the largest region in Ghana in terms of land area. It shares boundaries with the Upper East and the Upper West Regions to the north, the Brong Ahafo and the Volta Regions to the south, and two neighbouring countries, the Republic of Togo to the east, and La Cote d'Ivoire to the west.

The land is mostly low lying except in the north-eastern corner with the Gambaga escarpment and along the western corridor. The region is drained by the Black and white Volta and their tributaries, Rivers Nasia, Daka, etc.

#### Population size and distribution

The Northern Region is the largest of the 10 regions of the country in terms of landmass, occupying 70,384 square kilometres and accounting for 29.5 per cent of the total land area of Ghana. It has almost the same land area as the Western, Greater Accra, Volta and Eastern Regions put together (28.1%) or the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions combined (28.2%). Yet, apart from the two Upper Regions, the Northern Region's population is almost the same as that of Brong Ahafo and slightly larger than that of the Volta and Central Regions, which are much smaller in land area. The region currently has a population of 1,820,806, representing 9.6 per cent of the total population of the country.

#### Climate and vegetation

The climate of the region is relatively dry, with a single rainy season that begins in May and ends in October. The amount of rainfall recorded annually varies between 750 mm and 1050 mm. The dry season starts in November and ends in March/April with maximum temperatures occurring towards the end of the dry season (March-April) and minimum temperatures in December and January. The harmattan winds, which occur during the months of December to early February, have considerable effect on the temperatures in the region, which may vary between 14°C at night and 40°C during the day. Humidity, however, which is very low, mitigates the effect of the daytime heat. The rather harsh climatic condition makes the cerebrospinal meningitis thrive, almost to endemic proportions, and adversely affects economic activity in the region. The region also falls in the onchocerciasis zone, but even though the disease is currently under control, the vast area is still under populated and undercultivated.

The main vegetation is classified as vast areas of grassland, interspersed with the guinea savannah woodland, characterised by drought-resistant trees such as the acacia, baobab, shea nut, dawadawa, mango, neem.

#### Political administration

The region is divided into districts. A Municipal/District Assembly headed by a Chief Executive administers each district. Two-thirds of the members of the Assembly are directly elected. The remaining one-third are appointed by the Central Government. The districts are autonomous with regards to planning and budgeting of projects. The Assembly is presided over by a Presiding Member elected from among its members by a two-thirds majority of members present and voting. All Members of Parliament from the District are ex-officio members of the Assembly District. The following five new districts were created in 2004 to bring the total number to 18 districts in the region.

The main administrative structure at the regional level is the Regional Co-ordinating Council (RCC), headed by the Regional Minister. Other members of the RCC include representatives from each District Assembly, regional heads of decentralized ministries, and representatives of the Regional House of Chiefs. The Regional Coordinating Director acts as the secretary to the Council.

#### Cultural and social structure

The region has four paramount chiefs, namely: the Yaa Na based in Yendi; the Yagbon Wura in Damango; the Bimbila Naa in Bimbila; and the Nayiri in Nalerigu. Each represents a major ethnic group. The major ethnic groups of the region are the Mole Dagbon, (52.2%) the Gurma, (21.8%) the Akan and the Guan (8.7%). Among the Mole-Dagbon, the largest subgroup are the Dagomba and the Mamprusi, while the Konkomba are the largest of the Gurma, the Chokosi of the Akan and the Gonja of the Guan. The Dagomba constitute about a third of the population of the region.

The indigenous languages spoken by the people vary from district to district. The Gonja language is spoken mostly in three districts, namely East Gonja, West Gonja and Bole. Dagbani, the language of the Dagomba, is spoken in nine of the thirteen districts. The Konkomba language is spoken mainly in some parts of Saboba-Chereponi, Zabzugu Tatale, East Gonja and Nanumba, Districts. More than half of the population of the region (56.2%) are Muslims. The rest are largely adherents of Traditional religion (21.3%), Christians (19.3%) and other religious groups (3.3%).

#### Historical and tourist attractions

The Mole National Park, in Damango, West Gonja District, is a 4840 square kilometre reserve for animals such as elephants, buffaloes, wild pigs, antelopes, apes, birds and about 400 other species. The park has a motel with a restaurant, a bar and a swimming pool. This park, which is serviced by Forest Rangers, can best be visited with maximum satisfaction in the dry season.

Tamale, Daboya, Sabari, Nasia, Mole, Bui, among others, have exotic birds suitable for bird watching for pleasure. The savannah vegetation has a scenic beauty of its own, interspersed with rare species of flora and fauna. Baobab trees and ant-hills are part and parcel of this savannah natural vegetation of the region. Other aspects of the savannah scenery and views are the Nakpanduri and other hilly areas of the northern parts of the region, particularly the Gambaga Escarpment.

#### Shrines and groves

There are sacred groves that are traditional nature reserves created around shrines. Notable among them are the Jaagbo and Malshegu Sacred Groves. The Jaagbo Shrine, situated at 30 kilometres from Tamale, consists of about 25 acres of conserved and preserved vegetation of medicinal herbs and near extinct and mysterious plants around the Jaagbo fetish. Among the vegetation of the grove is the "mystery tree" with marks of the hooves of a horse. The Malshegu Sacred Grove is at Katalga, about 12 kilometres from Tamale.

Architecture, archaeology and culture The region is well known for its peculiar architecture of round huts with conical thatched roofs, which provide a particular scenic view. Among the relics of the past, which throw considerable light on the history of the people of the region, are the archaeological sites at Yikpa Bonso, in the West Mamprusi District, with relics of the Komas dating back to the nineteenth century (19th C). Other relics of interest in the region are at Jentilkpe and Kpaesemkpe.

#### Ancient mosques

Ancient mosques are a particular aspect of the relic legacy of the region which under pin the long history of Islam in the region. The Larabaga Mosque, which is of Sudanese architectural origin, dates back to the 13thC but the Bole Mosque, also of a similar Sudanese architectural origin, was built later. While the Banda Nkwahta and Malew Mosques were built in the 18thC, imitating older mosque designs, the Zayaa mosque in Wulugu, is not only of the 20thC but is peculiar in that it is an uncommon storeyed traditional design of historical and military interest.

The remains of an ancient defence wall are in Nalerigu, in the East Mamprusi District. What is interesting about this defence wall, which dates back to the 15thC, is not only that it was built by a powerful Mamprusi Chief but equally important, is that the wall was built with mortar of mud blood and honey.

#### Graves

While Mosque relics under-pin the in prints left behind by Islam, graves are reminiscent of battles fought year in the region.

There is a mass grave of fallen Dagomba warriors at the battle ground at Adibo, near Yendi, where the Dagombas fought the Germans. The grave of Naa Attabian, a great Mamprusi King, is at Nalerigu, in the East Mamprusi District, while that of Ndewura Jakpa, the greatest King of the Gonjas, is in Buipe, in the West Gong a District. The graves of massacred Gonjas, have now become shrines at Jentilkiye, where the Gonjas battled with Samore and his army of slave raiders. Evidence of the region being both an important source and route of slaves, abound in the region. Just as the castles are vivid reminders of the departure of the slaves for their unknown destinations in the Diaspora, Yendi is the real archive of important relics of the slave trade, as manifested in the grave of Babato and the relics of his army. Salaga, where the wells that provided water for bathing slaves for sale, still stand together with the residences of slave merchants, is a vivid reminder of this barbaric trade in human beings.

#### Myths

The mythical stone, which compelled the construction of a road to be diverted because it could not be removed, is still at Larabanga while a mystery tree with the mark of horse hooves turned up and down is in the Jaagbo grove, near Tawak. Another mystery tree is in the Regional Hospital ground in Tamale.

#### Festivals

The most important traditional festival in the region is the Damba, a relic of Islam, which has lost its religious origin of the celebration of the birthday of Prophet Mohammed. The Damba celebration is also a mix of music, dance, excitement, horsemanship and regal pageantry, at the climax of Naa Damba. The region is the home of the Fugu textile, the centres of production being Tamale, Gushiegu and Yendi.

#### Economic characteristics

Agriculture, hunting, and forestry are the main economic activities in the region. Together, they account for the employment of 71.2 per cent of the economically active population, aged 15 years and older. Less than a tenth (7.0%) of the economically active people in the region are unemployed.

The private informal sector absorbed 83.4 per cent of the economically active population. An additional 11.5 per cent are in the private formal sector leaving the public sector with only 4.3 per cent. Majority, (40.5%) of the 251,221 the not economically active are homemaker and just under a quarter (24.4%) are students. Those who are not working because of old age constitute 14.8 per cent. A small proportion is not working because of disability (2.2%) or are pensioners who are on retirement (1.2%) while 16.9 per cent are classified as others. These rates relate to the 10-year period preceding the surveys.

#### Household headship

The proportion of households headed by females in the region (14.1%) is much higher than the national average (11.0%). Among the districts, Savelugu-Nanton has the lowest proportion of female-headed households (9.4%); West Gonja (16.1%), Bole (16.7%) and the Tamale municipality (20.1%) have figures in excess of 15.0 per cent.

#### Ethnicity

The predominant ethnic group is the Mole-Dagbon, accounting for 52.2 per cent of the population. They represent the largest ethnic group in seven of the thirteen districts of the region. The Gurmas are the next predominant ethnic group, making up 21.8 per cent of the population. They are largely concentrated in seven districts and constitute the majority in three, Nanumba, Zabzugu-Tatale and Saboba-Chereponi. The bulk of the Guan ethnic group in the region is concentrated in three districts, Bole, West Gonja and East Gonja.

Islam is the dominant religion, of the region, with 56.1 per cent of the population professing Islam as their religion.

Traditional religion is the next dominant faith with 21.3 per cent, while Christians represent 19.3 per cent of the population. At the district level, Islam is the predominant religion of more than 64.0 per cent of the population in seven of the thirteen districts and constitutes over 23.0 per cent of the population in each of the other six districts. Traditional religion and Christianity each constitutes about a third of the population in Bole, Saboba-Chereponi and West Mamprusi.

#### Literacy

The distribution of the literacy status of the population 15 years and older by district. On average, about 22.0 per cent of the population 15 years and older, are classified as literate. This figure varies from about 12.0 per cent in Gushiegu-Karaga to about 43.0 per cent in the Tamale municipality. East Gonja is the next highest, with about 20.0 per cent literacy rate, considerably lower than the rate for the Tamale municipality. Over all, the proportion literate is 12.0 per cent higher among males than females.

#### Employment status

Nearly 68 per cent of the economically active population are classified as self-employed, while 22.9 per cent are unpaid family workers; only about 6.1 per cent are employees. This regional pattern is also reflected in all the districts. For example, the proportion of the self-employed ranges from 50.8 per cent in Zabzugu-Tatale, to 79.7 per cent in Savelugu- Nanton. The proportion of unpaid family workers varies from 5.2 per cent in the Tamale municipality to 45.3 per cent in Zabzugu-Tatale. The high level of unpaid family workers, recorded in some of the districts is probably a reflection of the high proportion of the population in the agricultural sector.

#### Employment sector

The bulk (83.4%) of the population of the region are employed in the private informal sector. An additional 11.5 per cent are employed in the private formal sector. This justifies the policy to encourage and reinforce the private sector to lead and speed up the growth of the economy. The public/semi public sector accounts for only 4.3 per cent of the working population.

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